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# MISSING SCHOOL, MISSING A HOME: THE LINK BETWEEN CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM, ECONOMIC INSTABILITY AND HOMELESSNESS IN MICHIGAN

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## INTRODUCTION

Attendance is vital to academic success but many children in Michigan are not making it to school. Based on recent estimates, Michigan has the sixth highest statewide chronic absenteeism rate in the country.<sup>1</sup> Close to one out of every six children enrolled in the state's public and charter schools were chronically absent in school year 2016-17, missing 10% or more of school days.<sup>2</sup> This is cause for alarm for Michigan policymakers, educators and families. Chronically absent students are less likely to meet grade level proficiency standards and are more likely to dropout of school than their peers,<sup>3</sup> with impacts seen as early as preschool.<sup>4</sup> These effects can be lasting. Among third grade students, those who were not chronically absent in kindergarten and first grade were three-and-a-half times more likely to read on grade level than their peers who were chronically absent both years (64% vs. 17% respectively).<sup>5</sup> The passage of Michigan's third-grade reading law, which mandates retention of students who are a

grade or more behind in reading,<sup>6</sup> makes these statistics even more pressing. If Michigan is to achieve its goal of becoming a top ten education state in the next decade,<sup>7</sup> addressing its high rates of chronic absenteeism will be critical.

Efforts to reduce school absences can be strengthened by understanding the characteristics of students most at risk. Race, income and disability status are all associated with elevated rates of chronic absenteeism, but one group stands out in particular: homeless students.<sup>8</sup> Data shows homelessness is a statewide issue affecting rural, suburban and urban communities alike, which indicates the need for a greater focus on the educational impact of housing instability in Michigan. This brief uses data from the Center for Educational Performance and Information (CEPI) to explore chronic absenteeism and makes policy recommendations to ensure all of the state's children make it to school.

## KEY FINDINGS

### CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM IS A STATEWIDE ISSUE AFFECTING THE EDUCATION OF MICHIGAN'S SCHOOL CHILDREN.

Roughly one out of every six children (16%) in Michigan was chronically absent in school year 2016-17, and all regions of the state had districts with chronic absenteeism rates of 25% or more.

### STUDENTS STRUGGLING WITH ECONOMIC INSTABILITY ARE MUCH MORE LIKELY TO BE CHRONICALLY ABSENT FROM SCHOOL THAN THEIR HIGHER INCOME PEERS.

Economically disadvantaged<sup>9</sup> students were chronically absent at three times the rate of their higher income peers (24% and 8% respectively).

### DISPARITIES IN CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM IN MICHIGAN ARE ALSO PROMINENT BASED ON RACE AND DISABILITY STATUS.

Close to one-third (32%) of African American students were chronically absent. Likewise, students with disabilities also faced significant challenges—roughly one-quarter (24%) were chronically absent from school.

### HOMELESS STUDENTS HAVE THE HIGHEST CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM RATE OF ANY GROUP IN MICHIGAN FOR WHICH DATA IS AVAILABLE.

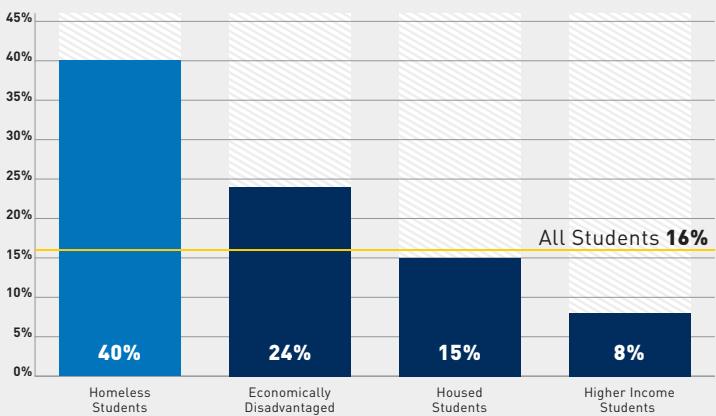
Forty percent of homeless students were chronically absent in school year 2016-17, a rate two-and-a-half the state-wide average and eight percentage points higher than the next highest category reported (African American students).

## HOUSING, ECONOMIC STABILITY, AND SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

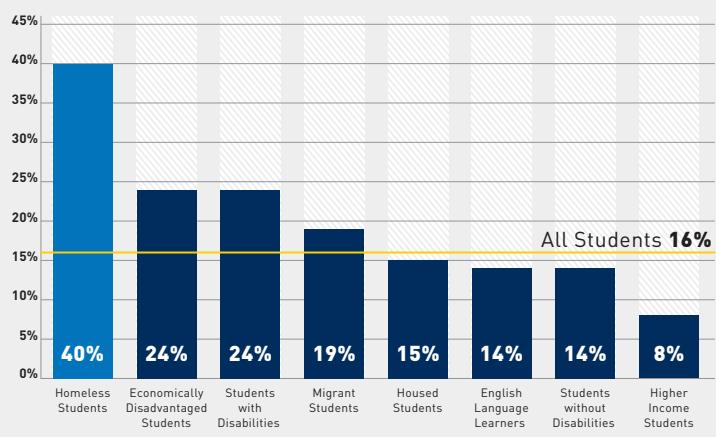
Not all children are at equal risk for chronic absenteeism. In Michigan, the relationship between housing stability, income and school attendance is stark.

- Economically disadvantaged and homeless students together made up just under half (49%) of Michigan's entire student enrollment, yet they represented three-quarters (75%) of all students who were chronically absent from school.
- Homeless students were chronically absent at over two-and-a-half times the rate of their housed peers and more than four times the rate of their higher income peers — who faced neither financial nor housing insecurity.
- In fact, homeless students had the highest chronic absenteeism rate of all subgroups in the state for which data was available. The next highest rate was eight percentage points lower. Among students who self-identified as African American 32% were chronically absent, followed by students with disabilities and economically disadvantaged students at 24%.

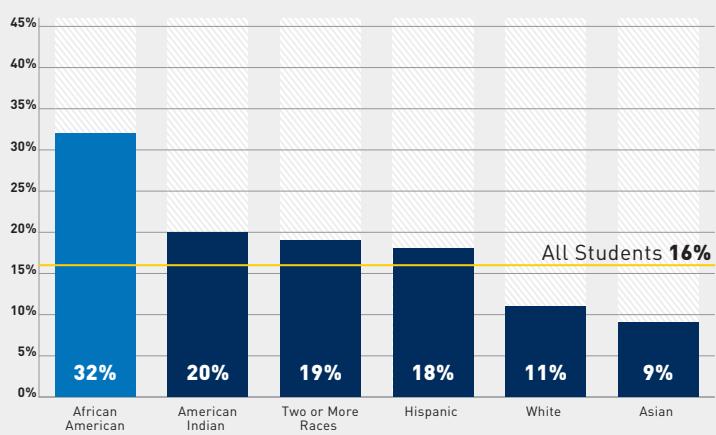
CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM RATE BY HOUSING AND ECONOMIC STABILITY IN MICHIGAN, SCHOOL YEAR 2016-17



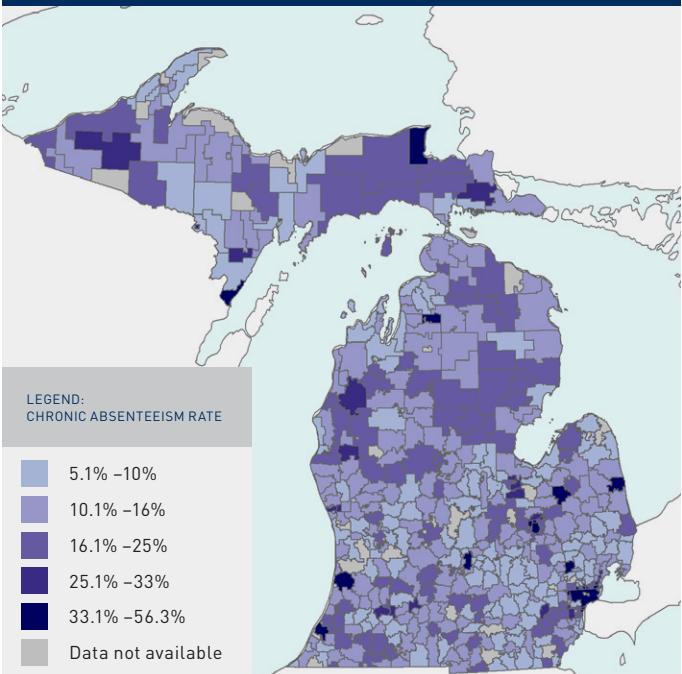
CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM RATE HOMELESS STUDENTS VS. ALL OTHER AVAILABLE SUBGROUPS IN MICHIGAN, SCHOOL YEAR 2016-17



CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM RATE BY RACE AND ETHNICITY IN MICHIGAN, SCHOOL YEAR 2016-17



Source: The Center for Education Performance and Information (CEPI). "Michigan Department of Education Student Counts, Attendance 2016-17". <https://www.mischooldata.org/DistrictSchoolProfiles2/StudentInformation/StudentCounts/Attendance2.aspx> (accessed August 5, 2018).

**CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM AMONG ALL STUDENTS BY SCHOOL DISTRICT, SCHOOL YEAR 2016-17**

**TOP TEN HIGHEST CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM RATES: ALL STUDENTS BY PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT, SCHOOL YEAR 2016-17**

SCHOOL DISTRICT	# OF STUDENTS	# OF STUDENTS CHRONICALLY ABSENT	CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM RATE
Detroit Public Schools Community District (Wayne RESA)	<b>48,888</b>	<b>27,533</b>	<b>56%</b>
Ecorse Public Schools (Wayne RESA)	<b>1,343</b>	<b>719</b>	<b>54%</b>
School District of the City of Flint (Genesee ISD)	<b>5,498</b>	<b>2,601</b>	<b>47%</b>
Westwood Heights Schools (Genesee ISD)	<b>1,628</b>	<b>749</b>	<b>46%</b>
Lansing Public School District (Ingham ISD)	<b>11,510</b>	<b>4,853</b>	<b>42%</b>
Westwood Community School District (Wayne RESA)	<b>2,207</b>	<b>917</b>	<b>42%</b>
School District of the City of River Rouge (Wayne RESA)	<b>2,239</b>	<b>927</b>	<b>41%</b>
Menominee Area Public Schools (Menominee ISD)	<b>1,456</b>	<b>599</b>	<b>41%</b>
Benton Harbor Area Schools (Berrien RESA)	<b>2,588</b>	<b>1,059</b>	<b>41%</b>
Alba Public Schools (Traverse Bay Area ISD)	<b>132</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>40%</b>

**IMPACTS ACROSS THE STATE**

Chronic absenteeism is a statewide issue. While rates vary dramatically by school district, all regions of the state have districts where at least one-quarter of all students enrolled were chronically absent from school.

- On average, 16% of all students in Michigan were chronically absent in 2016-17. Across school districts, however, rates varied by over 50 percentage points from a low of 5% in Ashley Community Schools to a high of 56% in Detroit Public Schools Community District.<sup>10</sup>
- In the 10 districts with the highest absenteeism rates in Michigan, 40% or more of all students were chronically absent from school.
- Five of the districts with the highest chronic absenteeism rates were located within Wayne RESA and two were in Genesee ISD. The remaining three districts were distributed across the state.
- Among the 10 districts with the lowest rates, just 5%-6% of students were chronically absent.

**TOP TEN LOWEST CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM RATES: ALL STUDENTS BY PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT, SCHOOL YEAR 2016-17**

SCHOOL DISTRICT	# OF STUDENTS	# OF STUDENTS CHRONICALLY ABSENT	CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM RATE
Ashley Community Schools (Gratiot-Isabella RESD)	<b>272</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>5%</b>
Midland Public Schools (Midland County Educational Service Agency)	<b>7,978</b>	<b>414</b>	<b>5%</b>
Pewamo-Westphalia Community Schools (Clinton County RESA)	<b>651</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>5%</b>
Troy School District (Oakland Schools)	<b>13,185</b>	<b>694</b>	<b>5%</b>
St. Johns Public Schools (Clinton County RESA)	<b>2,995</b>	<b>158</b>	<b>5%</b>
Rochester Community School District (Oakland Schools)	<b>15,389</b>	<b>819</b>	<b>5%</b>
Northville Public Schools (Wayne RESA)	<b>7,492</b>	<b>402</b>	<b>5%</b>
North Muskegon Public Schools (Muskegon Area ISD)	<b>1,046</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>5%</b>
Dexter Community School District (Washtenaw ISD)	<b>3,649</b>	<b>199</b>	<b>5%</b>
Harbor Beach Community Schools (Huron ISD)	<b>505</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>6%</b>

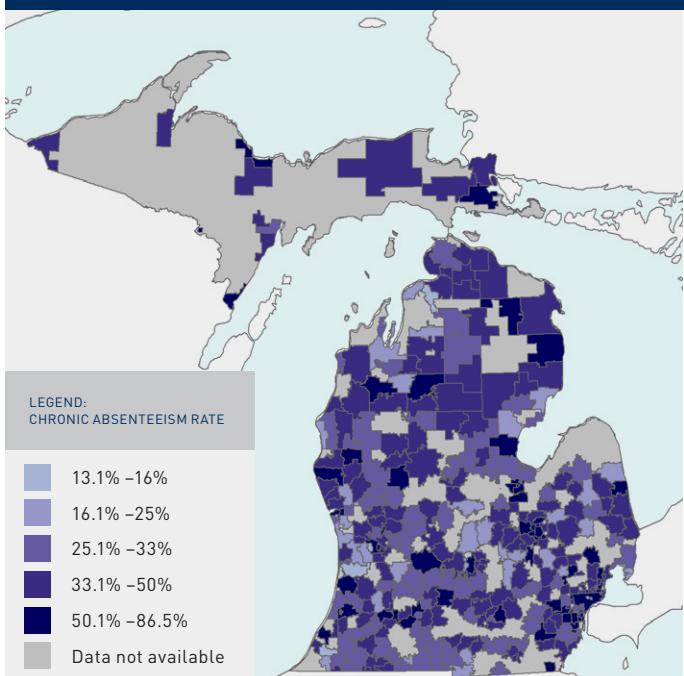
Source: The Center for Education Performance and Information (CEPI). "Michigan Department of Education Student Counts, Attendance 2016-17". <https://www.mischooldata.org/DistrictSchoolProfiles2/StudentInformation/StudentCounts/Attendance2.aspx> (accessed August 5, 2018).

## CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM CAN BE REDUCED

Chronic absenteeism varied greatly by district for homeless students. This variability presents an opportunity to identify what is working in some school districts to support homeless student attendance.

- While the state chronic absenteeism rate for homeless students is 40%, this rate by school district ranged from a low of 13% in Berrien Springs Public Schools to a high of 86% in Detroit Public Schools Community District.<sup>11</sup>
- In four school districts, homeless students were chronically absent at rates lower than the statewide average for housed students (16%). These districts, Berrien Springs Public Schools, Boyne City Public Schools, Jenison Public Schools, and Hamilton Community Schools,

### CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM AMONG HOMELESS STUDENTS BY SCHOOL DISTRICT, SCHOOL YEAR 2016-17



- The total number of chronically absent students was missing or redacted for "all students" in the original data. The percent is, therefore, not listed.
- Two schools were tied for 10th in the Top Ten Lowest Chronic Absenteeism Rates. Eleven schools are, therefore, listed in the "Top Ten Lowest Chronic Absenteeism Rates Among Homeless Students" table.

Source: The Center for Education Performance and Information (CEPI). "Michigan Department of Education Student Counts, Attendance 2016-17". <https://www.mischooldata.org/DistrictSchoolProfiles2/StudentInformation/StudentCounts/Attendance2.aspx> (accessed August 5, 2018).

### TOP TEN HIGHEST CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM RATES AMONG HOMELESS STUDENTS BY PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT, SCHOOL YEAR 2016-17

SCHOOL DISTRICT	# OF STUDENTS	# OF STUDENTS CHRONICALLY ABSENT	CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM RATE	ALL STUDENT CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM RATE
Detroit Public Schools Community District (Wayne RESA)	<b>918</b>	<b>794</b>	<b>86%</b>	<b>56%</b>
School District of the City of River Rouge (Wayne RESA)	<b>60</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>72%</b>	<b>41%</b>
School District of the City of Lincoln Park (Wayne RESA)	<b>68</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>71%</b>	<b>23%</b>
Wayne-Westland Community School District (Wayne RESA)	<b>260</b>	<b>179</b>	<b>69%</b>	<b>24%</b>
Southgate Community School District (Wayne RESA)	<b>54</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>69%</b>	<b>21%</b>
Romeo Community Schools (Macomb ISD)	<b>44</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>68%</b>	<b>12%</b>
Lansing Public School District (Ingham ISD)	<b>788</b>	<b>532</b>	<b>68%</b>	<b>42%</b>
School District of the City of Flint (Genesee ISD)	<b>567</b>	<b>380</b>	<b>67%</b>	<b>47%</b>
Redford Union Schools District #1 (Wayne RESA)	<b>93</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>67%</b>	<b>36%</b>
Orchard View Schools (Muskegon Area ISD)	<b>70</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>66%</b>	<b>31%</b>

### TOP TEN LOWEST CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM RATES AMONG HOMELESS STUDENTS BY PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT, SCHOOL YEAR 2016-17

SCHOOL DISTRICT	# OF STUDENTS	# OF STUDENTS CHRONICALLY ABSENT	CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM RATE	ALL STUDENT CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM RATE
Berrien Springs Public Schools (Berrien RESA)	<b>206</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>7.11%</b>
Boyne City Public Schools (Charlevoix-Emmett ISD)	<b>75</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>6%</b>
Jenison Public Schools (Ottawa Area ISD)	<b>74</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>7%</b>
Hamilton Community Schools (Ottawa Area ISD)	<b>73</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>14%</b>	*
Hudsonville Public School District (Ottawa Area ISD)	<b>88</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>17%</b>	*
Marlette Community Schools (Sanilac ISD)	<b>97</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>12%</b>
Deckerville Community School District (Sanilac ISD)	<b>55</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>14%</b>
Manton Consolidated Schools (Wexford-Missaukee ISD)	<b>63</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>14%</b>
Hillsdale Community Schools (Hillsdale ISD)	<b>121</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>10%</b>
Camden-Frontier Schools (Hillsdale ISD) **	<b>89</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>11%</b>
Dearborn Heights School District #7 (Wayne RESA) **	<b>89</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>17%</b>

highlight the fact that chronic absenteeism is not inevitable for even the most vulnerable students.

- School districts where homeless students struggled with attendance were not always the same districts where all students struggled. Only four of the 10 school districts with the highest chronic absenteeism rates for homeless students were also among the top 10 list for all students. Districts such as Romeo Community Schools, where 68% of homeless students were chronically absent compared to 12% of all students, highlight why it is important to examine trends by economic and housing stability separately.
- Despite promising attendance trends in some districts for homeless students, overall more attention is needed to help get this highly vulnerable group of students to school. In one-quarter of all public and charter schools for which data were available, half or more of homeless students were chronically absent in school year 2016-17.<sup>12</sup>

## POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Chronic absenteeism must be reduced in order to make long-term improvements in reading and math proficiency and graduation in Michigan. While this issue impacts all children, recognizing the greater risk that economically disadvantaged and homeless students face is key to the development of effective attendance policies and programs. Economically disadvantaged and homeless students together account for close to half of all students in Michigan, and make up 75% of all students chronically absent in the state. Unless Michigan addresses the impacts of economic and housing insecurity on attendance, it will not see significant improvement in academic outcomes.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### **ENSURE THAT ATTENDANCE PROGRAMS AND POLICIES MEET THE NEEDS OF ALL STUDENTS INCLUDING THOSE EXPERIENCING HOUSING AND ECONOMIC INSTABILITY**

Given the stark differences that exist in chronic absenteeism rates by the level of housing and economic instability a child faces, it is critical that programs to improve attendance are designed in ways that address barriers specific to children and families facing these challenges.

### **LEARN FROM SUCCESSFUL ATTENDANCE INTERVENTIONS BOTH WITHIN THE STATE AND NATIONALLY**

While chronic absenteeism data for Michigan shows an overall need for improvement in attendance among students, it also highlights areas of success. Many school districts have already implemented successful attendance programs in their districts. These districts are a valuable asset to the state as a whole, and can share what they have learned about reducing chronic absenteeism. Likewise, there are many national examples of successful attendance programs which can serve as models for Michigan.<sup>13</sup>

### **OPT INTO MiDataHub**

MiDataHub is a statewide initiative to improve the management and usability of school data. Opting into the initiative provides schools with streamlined access to previously disconnected sources of data which enables improved identification and outreach to struggling students. Presently, only 60% of Michigan school districts have signed up to participate in MiDataHub. Efforts are underway to increase awareness of the free program and to encourage universal participation. School districts can opt into the program via <https://midatahub.com/getting-started/district-application-information/>.

### **ADOPT REAL-TIME ATTENDANCE TRACKING TOOLS AT SCHOOLS STATEWIDE**

Early identification and outreach to students and families is vital for improving school attendance. It is easy, however, to miss early patterns of school absence that place students at risk for chronic absenteeism. Real-time attendance tracking tools make earlier identification easier, and are available to both teachers and administrators for free through Michigan DataHub and organizations such as Attendance Works.<sup>14</sup>

### **USE AVAILABLE DATA TO IDENTIFY AND PRIORITIZE SCHOOL DISTRICTS WITH THE GREATEST NEED**

Geographically visualized and interactive data on chronic absenteeism at the school district (and sometimes school) level is now available publicly and can be a valuable tool for state and local planning. Data broken out by race/ethnicity and disability status can be found at: The Hamilton Project: Chronic Absence Across the United States.<sup>15</sup> Data broken out by housing and economic stability in Michigan can be found at: Mapping the Impact of Housing and Economic Instability on Chronic Absenteeism in the State of Michigan.<sup>16</sup>

## ENDNOTES

- 1 Brookings. "The Hamilton Project: Chronic Absence across the United States, 2015-16 School Year," [http://www.hamiltonproject.org/charts/chronic\\_absence\\_across\\_the\\_united\\_states](http://www.hamiltonproject.org/charts/chronic_absence_across_the_united_states) (accessed October 2, 2018).
- 2 The Center for Education Performance and Information (CEPI). "Michigan Department of Education: MI School Data, Student Counts," <https://www.mischooldata.org/DistrictSchoolProfiles2/StudentInformation/StudentCounts/Attendance2.aspx> (accessed September, 12, 2018).
- 3 U.S. Department of Education. "Chronic Absenteeism in the Nation's Schools: An Unprecedented Look at a Hidden Crisis," <https://www2.ed.gov/datastory/chronicabsenteeism.html> (accessed October 2, 2018).
- 4 Ehrlich, Stacy B. et al. "Preschool Attendance in Chicago Public Schools: Relationships with Learning Outcomes and Reasons for Absences, University of Chicago", Consortium on Chicago School Research, May 2014.
- 5 Applied Survey Research. "Attendance in Early Elementary Grades: Association with Student Characteristics, School Readiness and Third Grade Outcomes", May 2011, <http://www.attendanceworks.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/ASR-Mini-Report-Attendance-Readiness-and-Third-Grade-Outcomes-7-8-11.pdf> (accessed Oct. 16, 2018).
- 6 Michigan Education Association. "Learn What's in the New Third Grade Reading Law", <https://mea.org/learn-whats-in-the-new-third-grade-reading-law/> (accessed October 15, 2018).
- 7 The Education Trust-Midwest. "Launch Michigan: Make Michigan a Top Ten Education State," <https://midwest.edtrust.org/press-release/launch-michigan-make-michigan-a-top-ten-education-state/> (accessed October 15, 2018).
- 8 The McKinney-Vento Act defines homeless children and youths as those who "lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence" this includes children and youths who due to loss of housing or economic hardship are living in hotels, motels, trailer parks, camping grounds, another person's housing, emergency or transitional shelters or any place not meant for human habitation (such as cars, public spaces, or abandoned buildings).
- 9 Economically Disadvantaged Students are those eligible for free- or reduced-price meals under the National School Lunch program, are in households receiving food (SNAP) or cash (TANF) assistance, are eligible under Medicaid, are homeless, are migrant, or are in foster care.
- 10 Charter and non-traditional school districts were excluded from the top ten list to maximize comparability across districts. In 41 school districts, the total number of chronically absent students was either missing or suppressed to protect student privacy. A total of 497 public school districts were included in the analysis.
- 11 Charter and non-traditional school districts were excluded from the top ten list to maximize comparability across districts. Additionally, school districts where the total number of chronically absent students was either missing or suppressed to protect student privacy were excluded leaving a total of 343 public school districts.
- 12 School districts where the total number of chronically absent students was either missing or suppressed to protect student privacy were excluded. A total of 393 charter and public schools were included in the calculation.
- 13 Attendance Works. "3 Tiers of Intervention," <http://www.attendanceworks.org/chronic-absence/addressing-chronic-absence/3-tiers-of-intervention/> (accessed October 8, 2018).
- 14 Attendance Works. "Resources: Data Tools," <https://www.midatahub.org/what-is-midatahub/district-application-information/> (Accessed October 8, 2018).
- 15 Brookings. "The Hamilton Project: Chronic Absence across the United States, 2015-16 School Year," [http://www.hamiltonproject.org/charts/chronic\\_absence\\_across\\_the\\_united\\_states](http://www.hamiltonproject.org/charts/chronic_absence_across_the_united_states) (accessed October 2, 2018).
- 16 [www.poverty.umich.edu/missing-school-missing-a-home](http://www.poverty.umich.edu/missing-school-missing-a-home)